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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: SPECIAL ENVOY WISNER HEARS RUSSIAN
OPPOSITION TO KOSOVO INDEPENDENCE

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns: 1.4 (b, d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Fresh from meetings in Pristina, Belgrade and Vienna, Special Envoy for Kosovo Final Status Frank Wisner held consultations in Moscow on February 9 to gauge Russian opinion on Kosovo's independence and emphasize the need for Contact Group unity. In meetings with DFM Titov (septel), lawmakers, think tank experts and former Prime Minister Yevgeniy Primakov, Wisner met a chorus of Russian opposition to a settlement lacking Belgrade's consent. END SUMMARY.

KOSACHEV: NO DUMA SUPPORT FOR AHTISAARI

12. (C) Duma International Relations Committee Chairman Konstantin Kosachev listened carefully to Wisner's argument for continued U.S. and Russian cooperation in securing UNSC endorsement of the Ahtisaari plan, but in a long rebuttal outlined GOR grievances over the process and proposed outcome. In 1999, he stressed, there was no agreement on an independent and sovereign Kosovo, and Kosachev blamed the West for conflating Milosevic's sins with the fate of Serbia. The West, he claimed, seized on Kosovo as a mechanism for foiling Milosevic, and by making Serbs "the bad guys" arrived at the pretext for Kosovar Albanian independence: Kosovo independence was the outcome of the U.S. "political project" to oust Milosevic. The Duma did not support a solution driven by an artificial timeline, and Kosachev pointed to Cyprus as a precedent for delay. Kosachev termed Ahtisaari's diplomacy a "show," designed to demonstrate that the UN Special Representative was backed into a corner by Serbian obstinacy. There was no good reason, Kosachev concluded, to force the Serbs to accede, and the West had failed to persuade the Serb leadership that its future was without Kosovo.

13. (C) Kosachev elaborated on Duma concerns over the Kosovo precedent, noting that Western arguments of its unique status were unconvincing, particularly to leaders from the "frozen" territories. "These people will use and abuse the Kosovo situation for their own purposes." While the Abkhaz were threatened militarily by Georgia, the Kosovars faced no military threat from Serbia, which Kosachev said proved that there was no need to rush to international judgment. Kosachev emphasized that UNSCR 1244 was accepted by the Serbs because it recognized the country's territorial integrity. Along the way, the international community changed the rules of the game, symbolized by the abandonment of the "standards before status approach." Kosachev noted his visit to Serbian settlements in Kosovo, highlighting the fears of the minority population. Noting his invitation to Kosovar PM Ceku to visit Moscow and their subsequent positive discussions in December 2006, Kosachev argued that there was time to achieve standards first.

14. (C) Kosachev pointed to Serbian government initiatives to enhance economic development in Kosovo, reiterating that

there were solutions other than independence. Kosachev sketched out three possible scenarios: Russian support for the Ahtisaari plan, which he deemed unrealistic given Belgrade's rejection of the proposal ("I exclude this option"); a Russian and possibly Chinese veto of the resolution, which would leave the problem festering; or unilateral recognition of Kosovo by small countries and then major powers, which would force Russia to recognize Abkhazia. The latter, he commented, would open a Pandora's box of international conflicts that would make Kosovo look easy in comparison.

15. (C) Wisner answered each of Kosachev's charges, highlighting that Milosevic's actions -- and not a Western conspiracy -- had changed the course of history in Serbia; Ahtisaari's plan was the product of creative diplomacy and a Contact Group consensus that needed to be maintained; Kosovo had made credible progress on standards, but now all residents were the victim of uncertainty over the province's future; under UNSCR 1244, Kosovo's future was consigned to the international community and the EU, U.S. and Russia could prevent its misuse as a precedent; and delay was incompatible with the facts on the ground. Noting that Serbia could decide its future, but could not undo its past, Wisner reiterated the importance of U.S. and Russian leadership in arriving at a final settlement to the Western Balkans. A Russian veto would precipitate a crisis on the ground, and unilateral recognition stripped the international community of the people and resources to implement Kosovo's transition to independence. It was time for Serbia, and the GOR, to take the Ahtisaari medicine: it tasted bad, but was good for the future of the Balkans. It was too late for new architecture; too much time had passed since 1999 for new initiatives to be launched, and Serbia had shown little

MOSCOW 00000628 002 OF 003

initiative in dealing with the issue.

16. (C) Kosachev concluded that Kosovo was a zero-sum game, whereby the United States would "win" independence for Kosovo, while Russia was supposed to "lose" in its efforts to defend the rights of Serbs, Abkhaz, South Ossetians, and Transdnistrians. By asking Russia not to see the similarities between Kosovo and Abkhazia, Russia was being asked to "betray" the Abkhaz people. When Wisner reiterated that this was not a zero-sum game, Kosachev answered that the U.S. should not insist on Kosovo being unique. Wisner and the Ambassador underscored international understanding of the possible implications of Kosovo on the frozen conflicts, but stressed that there were ways to address Russian concerns in the drafting of a UNSCR resolution. Wisner concluded that the U.S. and Russia had an obligation to maintain stability.

FEDERATION COUNCIL'S MARGELOV OFFERS CONCERNS

17. (C) In a meeting later that day, Mikhail Margelov, Chairman of the Federation Council's International Affairs Committee, outlined four concerns that Russia had regarding the proposed Kosovo solution. First, the EU and NATO were not offering enough incentives for Serbia or the Kosovo Serbs to support the plan. "The European Union is suffering from "expansion fatigue," and many doubt that it will actually follow through to help Serbia." Without guarantees of eventual incorporation and access to the EU's labor market, Serbia will resist. Second, any solution to the Kosovo situation "must be 'win-win' for the U.S. and Russia. If not, we will have an unhappy situation." Margelov said Kosovo could be a very powerful issue in the upcoming Russian election for the Communists, the Liberal Democratic Party, and other nationalist parties. This would drive the centrist parties towards this nationalist position. Third, the solution would be easier for Russia to swallow if the situation was made more attractive for Russian businessmen. Ceku's recent visit to Russia had been successful when he courted the Russian business community. Fourth, an

independent Kosovo would be an Islamic state in the middle of Europe, a situation with which many European officials are uncomfortable.

¶18. (C) Wisner thanked Margelov for his insights, and agreed that we needed to find a solution that was in the Russian comfort zone. Wisner reemphasized that a failed UNSC resolution could lead to a violent situation in Kosovo, and that NATO forces would "have their neck on the line." History, he said, is moving us in the direction of an independent Kosovo. He emphasized that the Ahtisaari plan would not fracture neighboring states.

RUSSIAN DIPLOMATIC ICON PRIMAKOV PREDICTS VETO

¶19. (C) Former Foreign and Prime Minister Yevgeniy Primakov, now Chairman of the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, predicted the Russian Government would indeed veto a UN Security Council Resolution that included a solution imposed on Serbia. Emphasizing that he did not speak for the GOR and was offering his own opinion, Primakov said the debate over Kosovo touched on two important but not always mutually supporting issues: territorial integrity of legitimate states and national self-determination. Changing borders without the consent of the affected state would open the door to chaos, he said. Primakov predicted that if Kosovo gained independence, the Albanian minorities of Macedonia, Montenegro and perhaps even Greece would seek to join a new "Albanian super state." This could lead to armed conflicts, he said. In time, Primakov said, Albania and Kosovo would merge.

¶10. (C) Wisner replied that one of the pillars of final status was that Kosovo would not merge with other states or regions. The international community, with a force on the ground, could prevent that. He emphasized the need to find a resolution now rather than later, saying that "eight years of UN rule has created a system has led to a situation that is coming apart." If Russia vetoed a UN Security Council Resolution, Kosovo would likely erupt into violence. In this case, the Security Council would meet under duress and be forced to come up with a new resolution that would address changed circumstances, and might be even worse for Serbia. Wisner added that NATO forces on the ground do not want to be put in the position of using force.

LUNCH WITH WISE MEN

¶11. (C) During a lunch hosted by Ambassador Burns, Wisner met

MOSCOW 00000628 003 OF 003

with outspoken Kosovo commentators Aleksey Arbatov, Director of the Center for International Security; Andrey Kortunov, President of the New Eurasia Foundation; and Vyacheslav Nikonov, President of Fond Politika. Wisner said Russia, the U.S., and the EU had a responsibility to take care of European crises. Failure in Kosovo would send consequential signals to "mischief makers" around the world. From the U.S. point of view, the Kosovo problem cries out for settlement. He said the Ahtisaari proposal was the best resolution. Lack of settlement could return the region to violence, he said.

¶12. (C) Arbatov and Nikonov agreed that recent Russian sympathy for Serbia was entirely due to the 1999 U.S./NATO bombing of Serbia, because Russians believed the Serbs were treated unfairly. In domestic political terms, Nikonov admitted that final status for Kosovo was not high on the agenda for most Russians. Arbatov raised Russian concerns over the Kosovo precedent, with Nikonov adding that the Duma was prepared to make specific linkage between Kosovo and the frozen conflicts. Wisner asked what would happen in places such as Abkhazia if Kosovo became independent. Arbatov speculated the Duma might work on a law to legally incorporate new areas into the Russian Federation, including

those frozen conflict areas that might want union with Russia.

¶13. (C) Arbatov said the best way forward was to defer resolution indefinitely and use the time to integrate Serbia into European economic institutions, possibly even NATO. If Kosovo gained independence, Arbatov said, it would only strengthen the hands of Serbian nationalists. Kortunov stated that Serbia must not be bullied into any resolution. He said Serbia "needed a light at the end of the tunnel" as much as Kosovo did. Nikonov added that the protection of the Serb minority was paramount. If the Kosovars created problems, the Serbs would not be adequately protected, Nikonov said. Wisner disagreed, saying a NATO force would still be present and there would be no Albanian pogroms.

¶14. (C) Wisner added that Kosovo independence would not create a perfect state, but a viable state with minority protections and legally able to receive investment from institutions such as the World Bank or European Development Bank. Addressing economic incentives for Serbia, Wisner said the door was open to Serbia, but they must walk through it.

ROUNDTABLE WITH THINK TANKERS

¶15. (C) Wisner capped the day of talks with a roundtable discussion organized by the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy, bringing together members of the Council specializing in Kosovo. Nadia Arbatova, Director of Research Programs for Russia in the United Europe, told Wisner that she and many of her colleagues did not doubt that Kosovo would be independent, but that she saw no need for an independent Kosovo now. Many Russians feel that the Ahtisaari plan is being rushed to the finish line for no apparent reason other than getting it done. Wisner replied that it had been eight years since Kosovo came under international jurisdiction, and Ahtisaari's commission had been working for 14 months. As a result, the international community could not be seen as rushing to the finish line. Sergey Oznobishev, Director of the Institute for Strategic Assessments, urged Wisner to find a common approach, saying that if Russia falls out with the U.S. and Europe on Kosovo, it could result in worsening relations with the West.

¶16. (U) EUR/SCE cleared this cable.
BURNS